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## Subversive connections

Roy Foster

ROGER WELLS

Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803

312pp. Gloucester: Alan Sutton. £16. 0 86299 019 X

Treatment of the subject and period dealt with in this book is too often pitched in a tone both combative and rancorous. This is partly because the issues raised can easily be cast in terms of immediate rather than historical preoccupations in politics, and partly because the field is becoming well tilled, and the available evidence necessarily limited: an aggressive stance is often taken up in order to stake out personal territory against interlopers. This interesting study is flawed, and in some ways vitiated, by both weaknesses.

From the beginning, Roger Wells's manoeuvres are cramped by the operations of others in the field: Ann Hone has recently analysed contemporary London Radicalism, and J. E. Cookson has dealt with the peace movement during the Napoleonic wars. Most importantly for present purposes, Marianne Elliott's magisterial *Partners in Revolution* has reviewed the connections between Irish rebels and French revolutionaries, combining stringent research and equable judgment to make the subject her own. All these books deal with historiographical controversies; all make their points no less effectively for their restraint. This approach is not for Dr Wells, whose predecessors in the field are variously described as "reactionary", "naïve", "myopic", "sterile" and "imbecile in their isolationism". Countering assertions are equally extravagant, E. P. Thompson's work being "magificent" and "unsurpassable" while

the author's own discoveries are crisply described as "staggering". All this is counter-productive as well as wearisome; there is a good deal of interesting material here, and even if it is not as suggestive as its author would like, the implications raised do not require such shrill pleading.

This is no less true for the fact that many of Wells's assertions, like those of others in the field, depend upon what he calls "speculative analysis" and inference. The interactions between Irish and British radical activity in the period have been well established over recent years; Wells adds to the picture of triangular activity between London, Yorkshire and Ireland, and postulates a network of connections stretching up to the "respectable" reaches of parliamentary opposition, as well as down to the secret stores of pikes and the oaths sworn in country pubs. This raises the wrangle over evidence and representativeness familiar since the irruption on to the historiographical scene of Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*; and though the vision of Francis Burdett as a would-be Philippe Egalité is more persuasive since Hone's work, the idea of Fox and the Duke of Norfolk ("fabulously prestigious", in Wells's rather odd locution) as serious revolutionaries may cause some surprise. Here as elsewhere, Elliott's restraint is more persuasive: "the role of the opposition in a United programme was one of government-forming when success had been achieved rather than active participation in its attainment, and given the long association between the opposition and many United leaders, the latter's belief in such co-operation was reasonable." In safer times, glamorous figures like O'Connor and Fitzgerald had attracted fellow-travellers; by the late 1790s, the situation had changed. Here, as elsewhere, Wells plays down the importance of the wartime mentality.

Where he does produce interesting material is on the Secret Service and the Alien Office - notably the figure of William Wickham, the government's vital counter-revolutionary operator, later to find a berth as Irish Chief Secretary. Wells does not, however, give him credit for the feelings which eventually drove him into retirement: self-disgust at being "compelled by his official duty to prosecute to death men capable and [sic] acting as Emmet has done in his last moments for making an effort to liberate their country from grievances the existence of many of which none can deny, of which I myself have acknowledged to be unjust, oppressive and unchristian . . . .

Too often, in fact, this study ignores the ambivalence, muddle and self-delusion of human actions, by attempting to construct a schematic "alternative" history. Too often, also, the interesting patterns that are drawn out regarding counter-subversion measures, or the interaction between food shortages and popular politics, are obscured by the poor production of the work as a whole. This book represents many years of research, and a large accumulation of detailed examples and references; it needed careful editorial attention, which is conspicuously lacking on every level. Notably in the sections concerning Ireland, inaccuracies abound. It does not entail confidence in read of sectarian outbreaks in Mayu in 1798, where they were notably few; nor to be told that the eighteenth-century Ascendancy "imposed a Protestant church" on the native Irish; nor to find Robert Emmet identified as T. A. Emmet's son (and Thomas Pakenham as a "nationalist historian"). Other references regarding the Irish dimension are completely obscure until the consistently appalling level of proof-reading is grasped: thus the Breton laws appear repeatedly as "Breton", and references to "Gaelic" practices must presumably be read as "Gaelic". (Wells may, however, have a case for describing Father Philip Roche as a "heroic libertine" rather than "libertarian".) Throughout the work, a film is imposed between reader and writer by recurring idiosyncrasies of spelling, punctuation and usage: "consols", for instance, appear as "consuls", the word "prevaricate" is invariably used instead of "procrastinate", and "conflagration" employed to signify any kind of outbreak, however uncom-

bustible. The text has to be deconstructed as it is read.

Wells is throughout attempting to make a case, and such erratic presentation can only muddle his message. Much of that case seems over-dramatic unless one bears in mind his description of "revolutionary activity" as "including popular movements and mass pressure for political reform on democratic principles". Given this generous definition, the only large quibble left is the meaning of "mass", and contemporaries as acute as George Canning saw that this was a "theoretical argument . . . when was a revolution effected in any state but by an active and enterprising minority? In the twenty years since Thompson's blockbuster, the question of relations and balance between state, minority and putative majority has been fiercely argued, often in terms that are a transparent cipher for more modern preoccupations. Wells's book is an intermittently absorbing statement on one side of the debate; but unless taken in conjunction with other recent contributions, the illumination it provides can only be fitful.

## Victims of the blight

Joseph Lee

JOEL MOKYR

Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850

330pp. Allen and Unwin. £22.50. 0 04 941010 5

Why the Irish Famine claimed, on Joel Moky's estimate, well over a million victims between 1846 and 1851, remains a major puzzle of Western European history. The Dutch-American Moky, a leading New Economic Historian, seeks to establish the causes, to which relatively little systematic attention has been devoted in the literature, that left the Irish economy uniquely vulnerable to the ravages of the potato blight. His procedure is to review in separate chapters the familiar explanations of Irish poverty - over-population, landlordism, agrarian outrage, capital shortage, labour difficulties, entrepreneurial failure, emigration. He marches the candidates in succession on to the parade-ground, inspects them closely, then dispatches them imperiously with the injunction, "must do better". This approach provides a stimulating survey of the current state of research into Irish economic history in the first half of the nineteenth century. In addition, his own explorations yield a rich harvest of information and interpretation. There are, in particular, new estimates of key demographic variables, including famine mortality, infant mortality rates, age at marriage, and birth-rates.

Some of the conclusions may raise hackles as well as eyebrows. Moky dismisses the Malthusian model of Irish starvation. "Had there been no famine, Ireland's population would have continued to grow like any other European country in the second half of the nineteenth century. Whether that in and by itself would have had any significant effect on the standard of living seems very much in doubt. 'Small farms', he feels, 'could have been viable in Ireland.' Agrarian outrage, on the other hand, 'very much retarded general economic development'. But Ireland allegedly suffered not only no Keynesian, but little structural unemployment. Even his exceptional level of seasonal unemployment was not fundamental to its distress. The real problem, according to Moky, was the low productivity of agriculture, which was due less to land scarcity than to the quantity of other inputs which were available - apart from labour and land. He seems to attribute the key deficiencies largely to the entrepreneurial inadequacy of the landlord class, which in turn he ultimately traces to the consequences of the English plantations of earlier

centuries - a robustly popular interpretation to follow on the application of econometric techniques.

So bald a list of some of the more striking, and sometimes controversial, findings cannot begin to capture the ingenuity of the calculations and the fertility of the hypotheses that make this an exceptionally rewarding work. It may be, indeed, that the very fecundity of Moky's mind has sometimes diverted his aim from the main target, and even tempted him into the trap of explaining too much. For there is a certain imbalance between the seventeen-page penultimate chapter on the Famine itself, and the preceding two hundred and sixty on pages. For all their power and penetration, these do not quite prepare the reader for two issues central to the Famine chapter, the regional variations in death-rates, and the importance of consumption patterns. "Ireland" did not, of course, starve. The Famine was heavily regional in its impact. Moky does assert on his very first page that "poverty was not confined to the proverbially wretched conditions in the Irish West: it was bad in the cottages of Armagh, in the grazing farms of the midlands, and in the Wicklow mountains. It was almost synonymous with life in Ireland." The structure of the book obliges us to wait, however, until page 267, for the crucial estimate of Famine deaths by county. While this records some excess mortality in even the least affected areas, the dramatic regional variations provide the most striking feature. It should be stressed that the work, its first page notwithstanding, contains important information on regional differences, though the author's "content analysis" approach to the evidence before the Poor Law Commission and the Devon Commission, illuminating though it is in some respects, may not take quite sufficient account of the underlying fragility of a great deal of the material.

But this information is not directly harnessed to explain the differences at county level recorded in the excess mortality table. It might have been wiser to have begun the book with this chapter, and to have sought systematic regional explanations for the recorded mortality differences - rather than relying largely on explanations of poverty at a national level to capture an essentially local phenomenon.

The nagging doubt about the specification of the regional question is reinforced by the suspicion that the analysis concentrates excessively on problems of production rather than consumption. This may be inherent in Moky's tendency to prefer supply-side explanations of under-development. In addition, his command of econometric techniques is naturally, and fruitfully, tempered, him to focus on quantitative evidence, which happens to be far more abundant for production than for consumption in the pre-

Famine economy. Relatively little of the analytical thrust of the volume, much of which is devoted to explaining the lack of investment in agriculture, seems to lead up to the crucial observation in the Famine chapter that "Irish agriculture, after all, was diversified . . . it was the consumption pattern of its lower classes that was insufficiently diversified." Certainly, starving Connaught cottiers watching their puny hoards of food being whisked away to pay the rent in 1847 can have derived scant comfort from the reassurance that "the outflow of sowings through landlords investing abroad . . . must have been wholly offset in the long run by export surpluses." That was truly a Keynesian "long run"! A consequence of the supply-side approach is that, in probing discussion of the impact of landlordism on the economy, it devotes relatively little attention to the implications of the role of rent for demand patterns.

Moky, as befits a comparative economic historian, treats Ireland as a case-study in the global history of poverty. Enlightening though this perspective is, it may be doubted if Ireland's experience in the first half of the nineteenth century serves as a good reminder of the cost of failing to industrialize. The Famine, after all, occurred in the political unit boasting the most industrialized economy of the time. Most of Western Europe failed to industrialize before 1847. But the "hungry 40s" did not turn into famines on the continent. The east of Ireland had similarly failed to industrialize, but it suffered nothing like the tragedy of the west. Moky's own estimate is that excess mortality was actually higher in the relatively industrialized north-east than in the less industrialized south-east. It may be that development must be distinguished more clearly from industrialization, and its meaning explored further. That promises to be one of the many wider issues in the debate likely to be provoked by Moky's constantly attacking approach. Moky's account towards his subject: it is to be hoped that this occasionally exasperating, but always exciting, study, in which every chapter is a work of review, article in its own right, will arouse the constructive response it so richly deserves.

*The Partition of Ireland 1911-1913* by Michael Laffan is the first in a new series of Student Paperbacks published for the Dublin Historical Association by the Dundalgan Press, Dundalk, Co. Du. (1983). (RE3: 0 86221 006 0). The opening chapters outline the historical background prior to the First World War, which is dealt with in Chapter 3. Laffan goes on to consider the Government of Ireland Act, the Fein and the Treaty, and the Boundary Commission, and concludes with a chapter on the "Two Irish states".

## Six poems from *The Price of Stone*

Richard Murphy

### Friary

Each time you breathe my name - Ross Errilly -  
Young leaf-growth rustles in the druid wood,  
Pelled to convert my land so thoroughly  
Stono crosses stand on grass where forest stood.

Here the rain harps on ruins, plucking lost  
Tunics from my structure, which the wind pours through  
In jackdaw desecration, carping at the dust  
And leprous sorcs my towers like beggars show.

Now my fish-ponds hold no water. Doors and aisles  
Are stacked with donors' tombs, badly invested,  
A gift for peeping toms: my lecherous gargoyles  
Hacked off by thieves, the bones unresurrected.

Here, too, buried in rhyme, lovers lie dead,  
Engraved in words that live each time they're read.

### Wattle Tent

Lobawn, he calls me in belts, his duck nast  
Under a thorn-bush on a pattering out lane;  
Wattled with hazel cut from the ramotat  
Copse of a departed ascendancy domene.

Fourteen lithe rods, carved into wish-bones, keep  
My head up in the rain. My tarred and buttered  
Siku he's smoked and cured. Rats from a trash-heap  
Steal bits of his bagged bread, but he's not bothered.

Thrown back by cheap wine on to his last straw  
He finds I can help the pain. His seed has sprang  
From road to road: boys gathering scrap in new  
Pick-nps, girls or young as Juliet wedded.

It dawns on me, when his bantam cock crows,  
I'll house him till he dies, wherever he goes.

### Baymount

Describe a gate-lodge like a dragon's mouth  
Tidling in boys and parents with a grin;  
Then spitting out the parents. Iron teeth  
Cloio when the last proud vintage car has gone.

Start counting days of terminal homesickness  
Minus the love of those who left you here.  
Draw six parallel lines cut quick across  
Two flaming circles. Be prepared for war.

Stand up, our youngest new boy, what's-your-name!  
Your uncle ate a winaglas in his mass  
At Woolwich, and Dobbs-major a live worm  
Washed down with ink. Prove you're no cowardly ass!

Open your mouth wide, and with one bite take  
The candle burning on this tower of cake!

### Lecknavarna

Look where I'm stuck the wrong side of Lough Fee:  
Bad road, no neighbours, in the squally shade  
Of a bleak mountain. Yet you took to me  
When young. What made you seek my solitude?

Did you need my poor virgic concrete shell  
No family cared to live in, just to write  
Poetry, worshipping my waterfall,  
Abased in loneliness by lust at night?

Still flowing steadfast in a flagstone cleft  
Of stunted alders clinging oo, it pours  
With resonant gravity, bringing the gift  
Of widespread raindrops crafted to grant force.

Hearing that strong cascade, you learned your trade  
Concerned with song in sodless falling, stayed.

### Beehive Cell

There's no comfort inside me, only a small  
Hart's-tongue sprouting square, with pyramidal headroom  
For one man alone kneeling down: a smell  
Of peregrine mutes and cretinical boredom.

Once, in my thirteen hundred years on this barren  
Island, have I felt a woman giving birth,  
On her own in my spinal carebellic souterrain,  
To a living child, as she knelt on earth.

She crawled under my lintel that purgatorial night  
Her menfolk merced her out of their coracle  
To pick dillisk and sloke. What hand brought a light  
With angelica root for the pain of her miracle?

Three days she thrived in me, suckling the child,  
Doing all she had to do, the sea going wild.

### Wellington Testimonial

Needling my native sky over Phoenix Park  
I belated the victory of wit  
That let my pollard Anglo-Irish mark  
Be made by Smirke, as a colossal spit.

Properly dressed for an obsolete parade,  
Devoid of mystery, no winding stair  
Threading my unvernacular head,  
I've kept my feet, but lost my noisy flair.

My life was work: my work was taking life  
To be a monument. The dead have won  
Capital headlines. Look at Ireland rife  
With maxims: need you ask what good I've done?

My sole point in this evergreen oak aisle  
Is to maintain a clean faconic style.

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# The knight's day's work

Sydney Anglo

JULIET VALE

Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context 1270-1350  
207pp. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.  
£27.50.  
0 85115 1701

One of the most intractable problems confronting the historian of ideas is the fragmentary nature of his material. How is it possible to convey a coherent picture of the mental attitudes and habits of the past without straining either evidence or credulity? Chivalric culture at the court of Edward III is a case in point. "The sun of English chivalry," wrote Charles Mills in 1825, "reaches its zenith in the reign of Edward III": a conclusion he based upon the frequency of tournaments under this monarch, and his foundation of the Order of the Garter. Difficulties, however, arise the moment one attempts to proceed beyond such generalization. Despite their numerousness, fourteenth-century sources for English chivalry are meagre and imprecise. We can, for example, establish the time and place of dozens of native tournaments; but we know almost nothing about what happened at them. We know that Edward III founded the Garter: but the exact date of that foundation and its original purpose have proved elusive.

Juliet Vale, recognizing that chivalry was an international institution, seeks to clarify such issues by preceding her reconstruction of the "skeletal" picture of mid-fourteenth-century English chivalry with a description of earlier, more richly documented Continental tournaments and with a discussion of Edward III's chivalry: thus providing both a historical and geographical context. She begins with two famous tournaments - Chaucer's (1358) to analyse the allegiances of the competing groups of knights; and Hem (1278) to reveal its Arthurian framework. The anticipated, but unfulfilled, participation of Edward I at Hem furnishes an opportunity to discuss his chivalric activities and reputation, stressing their Arthurian dimension and the close connection

between English and Continental knights. Dr Vale's second chapter examines tournaments in the Low Countries and northern France, as exemplified by the annual *feste de l'espérance* at Lille and the *feste du roy Gallehaut* at Tournai in 1331. Although this area was the most urbanized and commercially advanced in northern Europe, its bourgeois spectacles attracted regular participation by the old nobility. This participation, and the heraldic character of the sources, points to that "relative cultural homogeneity between the noble and patrician classes" which - together with its romantic tendencies - constitutes Vale's principal deduction concerning the chivalry of an area which had close contact with England throughout this period.

In her third chapter she turns to England, completing the chivalric context by assembling the fragmentary records of cultural patronage at Edward III's court. It is commonplace to remark that Queen Philippa imported chivalric taste from her native Hainault; but Vale argues that, though this taste did exist in Hainault, England was already party to it. Few of the documents which might have established this view now survive; and the same is true of the work carried out by the artists employed in the King's ambitious building projects. It is, none the less, significant that one of Edward's principal undertakings, St George's Chapel, Windsor, was "inspired by a specifically chivalric impulse". This single clear instance of reciprocity between chivalric theory and practice brings the book to its central concern: to cast light upon the shadowy relationship between court culture and knightly activities, first by considering the tournaments and court festivals which were so popular in the first half of Edward III's reign (Chapter Four), and then by evaluating diverse theories on the circumstances and purposes of the founding of the Order of the Garter (Chapter Five).

However, it is one thing to sketch a European chivalric context; and quite another to make it relevant. How far has the contextual method been imaginatively deployed here, and with what success? The author's own conclusion that the most striking

feature of her book has been the "degree of continuity in tournament practice between the late thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries" fails to convince - not because there was no such continuity, but because her study provides no clear picture of "tournament practice". She offers a penetrating exploration of groupings at Chaucer; but, when it comes to explaining what knights did once they had become part of a team, we are told only that the tourney (mass combat within a restricted area between knights armed principally with swords) was more important to contemporaries than the joust (mounted lance combats between single or small groups of knights). Yet jousts were popular even during the thirteenth century, both in northern and southern Europe. Hem was devoted to nothing else. At Chaucer's relative popularity of the combats is suggested not only by the two days of jousting to one of tourneying, but also by the fact that Bretel's narrative poem dedicates over three times as many lines to the former as to the latter.

Another assertion, that in England the tourney continued to flourish because of its value as military training, raises further doubts. Military relevance should have appealed equally to the Burgundian court; yet evidence there shows increasing emphasis on jousting throughout the fourteenth century; and, in any case, the sources scarcely justify the view that tourneys were markedly popular under Edward III. Vale's argument that tourneying remained important in his reign is based upon the team structure of his tournaments; the number of fatalities and severe injuries recorded in them; and the capture of horses. But the last point rests on a single instance; jousting remained a highly dangerous pastime even as late as the seventeenth century; and team structure was as normal for jousts as for tourneys.

The integration of background with foreground is laudable. If the tournaments in the Low Countries are truly relevant to English practice, then Vale passes too lightly over the fact that jousting predominated throughout this area; and how can this square with what she tells us of English tournaments? Similarly, whereas the

part played by the knightly classes in bourgeois shows is a striking feature of the Low Countries, it is impossible to pursue the notion of cultural homogeneity between the classes by arguing the converse for English court festivals, and lack of evidence compels the author to admit that there is "little proof" of bourgeois participation in these latter. Another awkward logical transition occurs when - having convincingly demonstrated that the Edward's Norman campaign of 1346, that the famous motto was particularly apposite at the time, and that it was reasonable, after Crécy, to adopt the motto as the basis for a chivalric order - Vale asserts that the founder members were chosen as "two potential tournament teams". This is an interesting hypothesis; it is not established fact. The sixty-year leap from Chaucer's not easily negotiated, and credibility stumbles in the attempt.

The origins of this book as a thesis are apparent. Its ninety-four pages of text are buttressed by 103 pages of learned apparatus, much of it only marginally pertinent, though two of the several appendices - an analysis of allegiances at Chaucer, and a provisional list of Edward III's tournaments up to 1355 - are very useful. The book teems with interesting detail, but there are some

omissions - most noteworthy being the duel between Visconti and De la Marche. Vale is concerned to establish England's chivalric standing, and the duel shows Edward III as arbiter of international dispute: a role dramatically spot-lighted by the subsequent execution in France of the victor, De la Marche, on the grounds of high treason for having fought his duel in England. It is also a pity that this study comes to an abrupt halt in the middle of Edward's reign. The explanation - that the later material is already familiar, might suffice in a typescript in the hand of a handful of scholars, but it is less satisfactory in a book. Vale's main purpose is to provide a "dynamic analysis" of the process of "cultural production and reproduction" in a plural society, while maintaining a close link between field observations and "hypotheses". Even the militarily reader who followed the author's suggestion to read his book backwards would soon become aware of the shortcomings of a "dynamic" model which ignores known or probable social history in favour of essentially invoked stereotypes of Middle Eastern society, and for which the link with "empirical" observations of cultural values is often blurred through a dependence upon English-speakers and interpreters.

Sohar in 1974 gave a first impression of having a very traditional, or perhaps even archaic, Middle Eastern condition of life, Barth writes. In the context of the study, the main point is that the Sultan of Oman until 1970 was a ruler of a palace state, and that the country to the outside world, as a consequence, the Sultan of Oman's post-1970 "new" - roads, schools, hospitals and government structures - were just beginning to materialize in Sohar when Barth and his wife, Unni Wikan, arrived on the scene.

Like other Persian Gulf coastal communities, Sohar society is essentially linguistically and religiously mixed. Sunni, Shi'i and Ismaili Muslims, a small Hindu community, Arabs, Persians, Baluch, ex-slaves, Indians (there are eight households) and Bedouin and townsmen live side by side. Barth is at his best in providing an account of these principal identities, and the styles of social comportment and prevailing brief biographies of a selection of Soharis. The text is

biography of Richard, published in 1981. Mr St Aubyn writes well, in clear and concise style, and is at his best when emphasizing his point with a quotation or a witty aside; for instance, on the biography of Richard written by Sir Clements Markham in 1906, "it is one of the minor wonders of the world that so many of Markham's readers have been willing to believe that the last Plantagenet king was a competent ruler of Sir Golaad, Baden Powell and Mr Grundy".

St Aubyn approaches his task with a great deal of common sense, and only but many writers seem to lose when they tackle this subject. Through his attempts to be impartial and to keep a piece of conflicting evidence only very occasionally does his mind slip, as, again, when discussing Markham's history, he comments: "In fact, it was only necessary to tell the truth to blacken Richard's name." The result is a book which does not offer a radical re-interpretation of the reign, but does provide an intelligent and considered view of the event leading to Richard's seizure of the throne. Richard is not the brilliant schemer of the Croyland Chronicle and Shakespeare, but a man forced, as much by his own safety as by any lust for power, to follow a course which was embarked upon led inexorably by murder and usurpation. Nor does he believe that Richard was motivated by fear alone. He was not a lack of opposition to him, but evidence of support and reward, and of apathy and fear on the part of the ruling classes, brought about by the intermittent civil war, and the firm belief in Richard's right to the throne, which were the forces which, in the twentieth century, have been widely read.

In recent years, so many studies of his reign have been published, ranging from the very learned to the unimpressive, that it is difficult to find a reader of yet another book on the subject not to ask whether it offers anything new or interesting to offer. In his preface St Aubyn states that his one "bells the story of Richard III's seizure of the throne from his nephew Edward IV 1463", and the title itself suggests that the book is simply a history of the year 1463. But this is somewhat misleading, for, in fact, less than half of it is devoted to the events of that year. To explain properly and put in context Richard's usurpation, the author traces a history of England from the accession of Henry VI to the Battle of Bosworth. He also discusses, both critically and in length, the contemporary sources upon which our knowledge of the events of Richard's reign are largely based. Finally, he provides a good survey of the major theories of the reign, from the Tudor chronicles to C. D. Ross's magnificent

# Community and competition

Dale Eickelman

FREDRICK BARTH

Sohar: Culture and Society in an Oman Town  
246pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £20.75.  
0 8018 2840 6

Those who would have the premises of a model clarified first and their implications specified thereafter would be more at home with Barth's book. Barth's intention is to provide a "dynamic analysis" of the process of "cultural production and reproduction" in a plural society, while maintaining a close link between field observations and "hypotheses". Even the militarily reader who followed the author's suggestion to read his book backwards would soon become aware of the shortcomings of a "dynamic" model which ignores known or probable social history in favour of essentially invoked stereotypes of Middle Eastern society, and for which the link with "empirical" observations of cultural values is often blurred through a dependence upon English-speakers and interpreters.

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accompanied by photographs which provide an excellent sense of time and place, compensating in part for an incidence of typographic and proof-reading errors well beyond the norm for university presses.

The abstract rule and model-building components of Barth's argument are much more tedious than his evocation of daily life. He argues that numerous cultural traditions co-exist in Sohar, each of which has "distinctive culture-carrying groups". His notion of cultural tradition is explicitly derived from Ruediger Brown, whose reputation hardly rests upon a significant development of the concept. The "traits" of each of these traditions are clustered into "cultural syndromes". Three "gender cultures" are included - male, female and male "transsexual" prostitute (*Khanith*) - for which Barth repeats the "convincing" argument presented by Unni Wikan in a companion volume (reviewed in the *TL* 5 September 10, 1982). Barth's aim is to separate out the idealational "stuff" of these cultural traditions, so that, to use his own example, a piece of Baluch needlework can be analysed to determine the extent to which it is an expression of women's culture and Baluch culture. Once these cultural threads are separated, he claims that the factors which produce and reproduce "change and dynamics" in cultural traditions can be discerned.

Barth's Soharis are "fundamentally unsympathetic to each other's values and in part ignorant of them". The result is an "unfocused, dispersed society", in which ruthless competition in the market-place, at least for men (women in their "culture" are said to be "avaricious" yet at the same time "passive", "inward-looking" and "contemplative"), is balanced by good manners and the avoidance of conflict. Barth acknowledges that Soharis none the less share "basic ideals and conceptions", but evaluate them differently. Since culture as defined by Barth provides no common ground for Soharis, he proceeds to ask how order is maintained.

Sohar, claims Barth, "contains and realizes within itself the essence of the traditional centralized Islamic state". The word of the Sultan's governor, the *kh*, is absolute and he tolerates no hint of opposition. The state provides the "regulating and protecting walls"

within which its citizens cultivate their "private gardens" through well-mannered, ruthless competition, while maintaining their distinctive values and attitudes. More reliance upon Omani social and political history and less upon received stereotypes of Islamic rule would have produced an argument more pertinent to how Soharis see and experience their own society. Even among non-Islamis in Oman, there is an awareness (and discussion) of the Islamic ideal of the Islamic state, realized in practice until 1955 in the interior. Leaders were chosen on the basis of a consensus of notables and men of learning, and dynastic succession was explicitly avoided in the Ismaili state.

Barth's discussions of extended family ties and ethnic identity, important components of his argument concerning personal autonomy, are often contradicted by the evidence he provides. He makes perceptive comments on the lack of significant, formally organized corporate groups and in-depth genealogical knowledge. He convincingly argues, as have many other anthropologists concerned with the Middle East, that descent ideologies are not necessarily central to understanding the social life, but he fails to document his further contention that Soharis have a considerable latitude in contracting marriage ties without regard for ethnicity and extended families. To provide two examples, Barth claims that 14 per cent of Soharis marry "first and second cousins", a practice which he says is "correct and desirable according to Islam". The rest marry "strangers", a term which he sets off in

quotes although it remains undefined. Cousin marriage hardly exhausts the more nuanced notions of "family" ties possessed by Soharis, which are often international (primarily for the Shi'i minority) and regional for other groups. The "discovery" of family ties in neighbouring villages is an important means of keeping bridewealth within reasonable bounds. For a book concerned with the "dynamics of change", a more accurate location of Sohar in its wider social and political context would have been useful. The assumption that "Arabic-speaking peoples were politically impotent and, indeed, apart from the questionable case of Egypt, ruled themselves nowhere except in Oman" well into the 1950s is extraordinary. The last Ismaili imam hardly died in Cairo in 1959; he is alive and well, if without influence, in Dammam. The former Sultan hardly made "repeated" visits to Sohar - he made precisely two in the course of thirty-eight years - and Sohar now and in the early 1970s, although not a centre of Islamic learning, has Sunni and Shi'i scholars with significant community influence who were trained in centres of learning elsewhere in Oman and the Gulf.

"Life in Sohar, as presumably in many places in the world, is genuinely problematic." Indeed it is. Barth, like Carleton Coon, whose now-discarded "mosaic" image of the Middle East he characterizes as "brilliant", has none the less succeeded in presenting at least some elements of identity and social style in a complex and fascinating community.

# Cash and conjugality

David Wilson

MARION BENEDICT AND BURTON BENEDICT

Men, Women and Money in the Seychelles  
289pp. University of California Press. £20.75.  
0 520 04592 0

Two Benedictis originally studied two separate communities in the Seychelles, one rural, the other urban, in 1960, and returned for a second study in 1975. Such return visits allow anthropological field-workers to transcend the limitations of the present and study at first hand processes of social and economic change. This time dimension is extended even further back by Burton Benedict in his historical interpretation of the patterns of conjugal relationships which form the central theme of the book. Previous writers have depicted the Seychelles islanders as being "immoral" and "promiscuous", the evidence for which is the low rate of "illegitimacy" and the high rate of "marriage". Benedict eschews such single-cause explanations for this as poverty or racial predisposition, preferring instead to see relationships between the sexes as embedded in a complex legacy of slavery, the plantation system, the class/colour/status pyramid, and the exigencies of daily life in islands where there are relatively few employers and a large pool of potential employees. Central to this account is the basic necessity for the islanders to have some source of cash income. Social status is seen as firmly based on the material resources that an individual can control. Many couples prefer not to go through the formality and expense of a legal marriage and choose instead the more flexible alternative of a common-law relationship.

L. W. St John-Jones has not given proper acknowledgment to C. Langford's discussion of Cypriot censuses, although he repeats its substance, nor does he refer to a major thesis on Cypriot migration to the UK by Robin Oakley (1976). He seems also to have missed Richard Patrick's meticulous work on the tendency of Greek and Turkish Cypriots to live less commonly in mixed settlements, over the past century, which is a pity since at other points in the book he shows sensitivity to the issues arising out of communal tensions. These omissions relate to central demographic issues.

The Benedictis divide their book into two parts. The anthropological husband presents his data, objectively and impersonally, in the third person, whereas his research-assistant wife

appears as an active participant in first-person confrontations with her informants. In principle, this division neatly negotiates some of the ambivalences of "participant-observation" although it is a pity that the Benedictis' field-work was carried out in different communities and therefore does not overlap directly in terms of people and events. While I can readily identify with the confusion Mrs Benedict experienced when confronted by an alien culture, and admire her honesty in describing how she attempted to come to terms with it, I must admit to more than a little unease when she disarmingly tells us that her case study formed an understanding of the logic behind "grievance", the local system of magical beliefs and practices should be seen as a "novelty", that her central character is a "fiction" and an amalgam of several women, her dialogue with them "reshaped", and the chronology of events "mangled". Although she succeeds in conveying the spirit of island life with all its petty jealousies and obsessions it is questionable whether her approach constitutes an anthropological account in the recognized sense of the term.

Two distinct images appear constantly in the writings of visitors to the Seychelles. One is the "Garden of Eden" theme, with its connotations of sexual indulgence and racial harmony in an idyllic South-Sea island setting. The other is that of a "Paradise Lost" with its equally exaggerated vices of drunkenness and promiscuity, and of a heartless people driven by a sort of amoral individualism. Both images are crudely distorted and the Benedictis go a long way towards providing a reasoned account of the historical, cultural and economic pressures which channel and guide the behaviour of the Seychellois into ways which, however incomprehensible from the outside, make sense from within. Obviously they can be accused of neglecting certain topics, such as the emergence of party politics or the activities of local entrepreneurs responding to the rapidly changing opportunities generated by tourism. Little information is provided about the islands since their independence in 1975.

But the Benedictis set out to provide a comparative study of family groups and as such their book is an important addition to the ethnography of the Seychelles specifically and of Indian Ocean Creole societies generally; a field Burton Benedict has made his own.

# Good folk and bad gentry

Venetia Newall

BOB BUSHAWAY

By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880  
293pp. Junction Books. £14.50 (paperback, £6.95).  
0 86245 072 1

Bob Bushaway has gathered a great deal of historical material. He has interesting quotations from Goldsmith, Marx, Gramsci and J. S. Mill, and his work is meticulously annotated with notes and indexes. Scorning the search for pagan origins beloved by many authors of popular books on customs, he despises those Victorians who saw folklore as quaint fragments of a vanished era. His approach is "social and economic".

All this is most commendable. And yet it has to be said that this is a disappointing book. Old-fashioned writers on folklore are often romantic; retreating into a world of thatched cottages, smocks and maypoles, they dream of a Merrie England when all was perfect. Mr Bushaway is properly critical of his approach, but unfortunately he favours a new romanticism. There are echoes of the idealized Soviet peasant in his country folk, all brothers together as they strive in their "customary activity" - a vile phrase. Alas, reality was not always so nice. Customs like Riding the Slang could be pretty unpleasant if you were at the receiving end, and it wasn't necessarily imposed for wife-beating either, but for sexual transgressions. The folk could be merciless in their judgments about such things.

There is no question that the upper classes and a very great deal to answer for. Employers and landowners were often immoral, exploitative and ungenerous towards those in their power. But the author is too simplistic and too biased. Old-fashioned Marxist historians will enjoy his abrasive study, which paints a very bleak picture of the "gentry" and bourgeoisie. They cannot do right, according to Bushaway. Support for a custom signifies forcing participants to be deferential and conform; lack of support is only an attempt to control or suppress a custom.

The clergy do not fare much better. We hear much about the obnoxious Mr Skinner - a sour kill-joy if ever there was one - and poor old Revd Bowles, who gave 400 of his parishioners a Christmas dinner (it must have cost him quite a bit). Is it really dismally: "Doubtless these parishioners were well-chosen and could be described as 'deserving'." sneers Bushaway, though he admits having no evidence for this statement. I wonder what he thinks of Father Lower and the other priests who built up the Christian Socialist Movement? Perhaps they were patronizing too.

Bushaway is not always consistent. He is critical of geographical folklore studies, yet his own is based on material that "concentrates on southern England because it is important to consider a reasonably coherent area". Thus his work is not as comprehensive as its title implies. There is an emphasis on the South and stress on such "customary activity" as diet-gathering and collection of largesse.

His descriptions are of limited value. He has little to say that is new about the customs and his comments are often banal. Most pictures might have been a good idea and there should have been a listing of books cited. It would have been generous also to have acknowledged the work of Richard M. Dorson, the American scholar who wrote the only major history of folklore studies in this country. But perhaps Mr Bushaway doesn't like American either.

Kent Lore: A heritage of fact and fable by Alan Blinn has recently been published (175pp. Hale. £8.95. 0 7090 1013 3).

# The Ricardian lobby

George Holmes

JEREMY POTTER

Good King Richard?: An account of Richard III and his reputation 1483-1983  
287pp. Corgi. £9.95.  
0 570 46463 9

Richard III was crowned king of England five hundred years ago on July 6, 1483. Most of this book is taken up by an agreeable romp through the pictures given of him and his career by the many writers about him since that date. The extraordinary dispute about his character - was he a shameless usurper who murdered the Princes and committed other nefarious deeds to promote his own ambition or a patriotic statesman who tried to save England from a perilous war with France? - which has been produced by writers of genius and dedication on both sides.

Against Richard, two stand out at the beginning, both influenced by stories convenient to their Tudor masters. Polydore Vergil was a serious historian; St Thomas More hardly a historian at all. From them springs Shakespeare, whose play does more than anything else to preserve and foster the hostile legend in the popular mind. These three are enough, but it also happens that the first half of applications of modern methods of research to that period which took place in the mid-nineteenth century led to the writing of James Gairdner's standard biography (1878), which founded a "rational" hostile view of Richard as cruel and brutalized by the apparatus of new scholarship which thus presented his friends with a

serious new enemy in the modern world.

The line of serious pro-Richard writers seems to begin with the biography composed by Sir George Buck, a descendant of a supporter of Richard, in 1619. That was too little known to have much effect but his successors included Horace Walpole's *Historic Doubts* and the sentimental two-volume *Richard III* of Caroline Halsted (1844), both works of substance and serious scholarship. Moreover, Gairdner's life inspired a violent and scholarly dispute from a unimpaired geographer, Sir Clements Markham, another *Richard III* (1906). Jeremy Potter tells us about these writers and many others - not to mention films and a French opera in which Richard's attempted marriage to his niece begins with a wedding march to the tune of *Ride Britannia* - with much verve. Whatever professional historians think of the quality of the writing, the *Richard III* dispute is an odd, persistent thread running through English letters since the seventeenth century.

Mr Potter is Chairman of the Richard III Society, founded in 1924, which we are told, has a membership of 2,500, and of which he gives us an interesting account at the end of his book. He justifies it on the grounds that the search for truth about the past is necessary to save truth in the present. Who could disagree? The Society appears also to have been very active in recent years from more light-hearted defence of Richard to the publication of a learned journal, *The Ricardian*, and of the major unpublished manuscript relating to Richard's reign, *Harleian 433*. The more serious scholarly work, however, does not seem to have totally overwhelmed Potter. There is no mentioning the defences of Richard in

the positions which he adopts. For example, the latest fragment of evidence to be discovered relating to the deaths of the Princes is in the set of London annals discovered in the College of Arms by Richard Firth Green and published by him in 1981. It states, under the year 1482-3, that they "were put to death in the Tower of London by the visa of the duke of Buckingham". Potter refers to this entry as important evidence of Buckingham's involvement. It is also, however, if Green is correct in his view of the document, the earliest record of belief that the Princes were dead, and an important support for the opinions reported abroad by Domenico Mancini, the main authority for their early death. Though he is not an extreme defender of Richard, Potter's book betrays a constant tendency to pluck out evidence favourable to Richard - in this case the transfer of responsibility to Buckingham, of which readers should beware.

Potter's friendship for Richard is shown also in the treatment which he gives to the recent biography by Charles Ross (1981) which, towards the end of the book, betrays the rather enthusiastic pro-Richard volume by P. M. Kendall published in 1955. For Potter, Ross is a "moderate anti-Richard". Readers who meet Ross in the pages of Potter's book may not realize that the new biography attempts to write about Richard, a book which seeks in perspective in terms of fifteenth-century problems and attitudes to be seen as a turning point in the history of the end of the Richard III Society. After the story that Potter has told us may be confident that that is very unlikely

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In recent years, so many studies of his reign have been published, ranging from the very learned to the unimpressive, that it is difficult to find a reader of yet another book on the subject not to ask whether it offers anything new or interesting to offer. In his preface St Aubyn states that his one "bells the story of Richard III's seizure of the throne from his nephew Edward IV 1463", and the title itself suggests that the book is simply a history of the year 1463. But this is somewhat misleading, for, in fact, less than half of it is devoted to the events of that year. To explain properly and put in context Richard's usurpation, the author traces a history of England from the accession of Henry VI to the Battle of Bosworth. He also discusses, both critically and in length, the contemporary sources upon which our knowledge of the events of Richard's reign are largely based. Finally, he provides a good survey of the major theories of the reign, from the Tudor chronicles to C. D. Ross's magnificent

*Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E. M. Carrus-Wilson* edited by N. B. Harte and K. G. Poole. Recently been published by Hambro, £19.50, 0 435 3256 2. Carrus-Wilson's leading position in the history of the medieval economy is attested by the international contributions to the volume. One, which deals with the aspects of cloth-making in the Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary and France, Part Two includes essays by Jerzy Wyrozumski, "The Trade of Poland in the Middle Ages", which look at the European trade, while Part Three examines the uses to which textiles were put in Maria Hoffmann's "Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe".

# The island counts

Peter Loizos

L. W. ST JOHN-JONES

The Population of Cyprus: Demographic Trends and Socio-economic Implications  
285pp. Maurice Tompkins. £12.25.  
0 85117 232 6

Demography can be done in two quite different ways. One is technical, and involves establishing facts - actually counting heads, or looking at how many have claimed to count them. In the sort of demography there are "figures" which are either believed; or interpreted from this, for example, the first general study of the population of Cyprus, that a census of 1946 was a great success. Technical demographers are statisticians. The second kind of demography is first and foremost economic and social. It looks at the numbers to see why things have happened, and what they may be expected to do. It is not a science, but a social science, and its practitioners are usually more interested in the interpretation of the figures than in the figures themselves.

The Population of Cyprus is more of the second kind. It tells the reader which figures date from 1881 to 1981, and which are likely to be reliable. It is written with a useful and up-to-date eye to the island's problems, and it is very far from being a dry study of census figures. The numbers are given social and economic context, and are

categories: peasants, new urban residents, the survivors of endemic malaria, newly educated women seeking employment, and so forth.

The book's main argument is that Cyprus is notable, for in the past 100 years it has moved from being like a Third World country, with low life expectancy, to being like an industrialized one. In 1911 agriculture occupied 64 per cent of the labour force, but by 1973, only 16 per cent. The per capita income doubled in the 1950s, and fertility halved between 1894 and 1965. There has been significant migration, but proportionately less in the economically depressed 1930s than in the politically turbulent period, 1955-63. In the margins of this story are hints of another one: there is a suggestion that the British colonial administration made a sound job of public health, and at least gave the Cypriots good enough government to enable them to prosper or migrate. But otherwise, the book does not directly engage any particularly crucial issues of history, or comparative development, being content to provide a commentary on the basic population data.

L. W. St John-Jones has not given proper acknowledgment to C. Langford's discussion of Cypriot censuses, although he repeats its substance, nor does he refer to a major thesis on Cypriot migration to the UK by Robin Oakley (1976). He seems also to have missed Richard Patrick's meticulous work on the tendency of Greek and Turkish Cypriots to live less commonly in mixed settlements, over the past century, which is a pity since at other points in the book he shows sensitivity to the issues arising out of communal tensions. These omissions relate to central demographic issues.







